

# MAHABHARATA – Part 23

(The Death of Karna)



Karna was chosen as the Supreme Commander of the Kaurava forces after the sad demise of Guru Dronacharya. Duryodhana hailed him with joy and great expectations, "You alone can win victory for the Kauravas." Karna was fond of Duryodhana; he was a capable, efficient and skilled warrior. He was happy to get an opportunity to repay the debt of affection and gratitude which he owed to Duryodhana.

That was the sixteenth day of the battle of Kurukshetra. The battle raged on for the whole day. Yudhishtira had an interesting combat with Duryodhana, in which he killed all the four horses of Duryodhana's chariot and the charioteer as well. Then he tore away his standard and broke his bow. The sword from his hand was tossed away. Other Kaurava warriors surrounded Duryodhana to give him some relief. Later in the day again the combat started. Yudhishtira threw a javelin at Duryodhana who fainted. Kritavarma took Duryodhana away from the battle field. On that day Karna had a duel with Nakula, the fourth of the Pandavas. Nakula lost his chariot, charioteer and bow and became helpless. Karna could have easily killed Nakula but he only smiled and let him go. In a similar way, Karna had terrible duels with Yudhishtira, Bhima, and Sahadeva. In battle, he bested all of them, and could even have killed them. But he had promised Kunti that he would not kill any of the Pandava brothers except Arjuna, so he only humiliated them, he did not kill them.

Duryodhana wondered why Karna had not killed them when he could have done so. Duryodhana was greatly disappointed because Karna lost the whole first day of his command and failed to kill Arjuna, but he did not say a word to him. He had full faith in Karna, who said, "Arjuna and I will fight tomorrow. Either I win killing him or I lose my life." Karna was keen to have a charioteer like Krishna, who was the charioteer for Arjuna. Duryodhana took courage to request Shalya if he could agree to be Karna's charioteer. At first Shalya was wild with rage at the idea, but later he agreed. It was considered a lowly position, which is why he got angry.

On the fateful day, the seventeenth day of the battle at Kurukshetra, two chariots proceeded towards each other. One was carrying Karna and was driven by Shalya, a veteran warrior, while the other was driven by Lord Krishna and carried Arjuna. It was to be no ordinary fight. It was to be a fight between two brothers. Karna knew it but Arjuna was unaware of this fact. It was going to be the greatest combat of the entire battle of Kurukshetra.

In the meantime, something very ghastly took place. Duhsasana and Bhima faced each other. Duhsasana sent a shower of arrow at Bhima. As Bhima thought of what Duhsasana had done to humiliate Draupadi, the anger within him swelled. Said Bhima, "I have a debt I owed you for all these fourteen years. I have not forgotten it for a moment. I will fulfil my oath today."

Throwing away all weapons, Bhima jumped from his chariot and leapt upon Duhsasana like a tiger. It was a terrible fight, indeed. Bhima caught hold of Duhsasana and threw him on the ground. He put his foot upon his neck and tore off his right hand. Duhsasana was one of Duryodhana's brothers, and it was he that had dragged Draupadi from her chambers before the Kaurava court, when Yudhisthira had lost her in the gambling match. At that time, Bhima had vowed to someday rip Duhsasana's hand off and drink his blood. To fulfill his own oath, Bhima ripped open Duhsasana chest with a swift stroke of his sword, and he drank warm blood which spurted out. Like a beast of prey, Bhima danced around, mad with the spirit of revenge and roared aloud, "I have achieved it. The oath I took against this sinner has been redeemed." The gruesome sight made everyone tremble with fear. Duryodhana stood quivering on seeing the wretched end of his beloved brother.

Even Karna was shaken. Shalya, who watched signs of depression on the face of Karna, said to him, "Oh Karna, do not flinch from duty. Advance towards Arjuna. Win or depart to the regions where the brave go after being slain on the battlefield." At this ominous moment, Dronacharya's son, Ashwatthama, advised Duryodhana to end the gruesome war and make peace with the Pandavas. Duryodhana, however, was even more determined to carry on. Duryodhana said "Did you not see Bhima dancing over my brother's mangled body? How can I now talk of peace at this stage? I must take revenge for my beloved brother's death."

A great battle followed between Karna and Arjuna, which each displaying supernormal abilities using their bows. Karna, the son of Surya sent a dazzling arrow, which spat fire and made for Arjuna, like a serpent with its flaming double-tongue out. Then Krishna, in the nick of time, pressed the chariot down five fingers deep in the mud. The arrow carried away Arjuna's crown but his head was saved. Arjuna's face was red with shame and anger, and he fixed a dart on his bow to make an end of Karna. Karna's fated hour had come. As had been foretold, the left wheel of his chariot suddenly sank in the soft ground. Karna jumped down on the ground to lift the wheel up from the mud.

When Karna noticed that Arjuna's arrow was still pointed to him, Karna said, "Wait a minute!" he said. "My chariot has sunk in the ground. Great warrior as you are, and knowing dharma as you do, you would certainly not take unfair advantage of this accident. I shall presently set my car right and give you all the battle you want." Arjuna hesitated and paused. Karna was now somewhat perturbed on account of the mishap. He remembered the curse that had been pronounced on him, that at the fateful moment his chariot wheels would get stuck in the ground. He again appealed to Arjuna's sense of honor. Now Krishna intervened. "Oh Karna, now you remember that there is something like fair play. How far was it manly and moral when Draupadi was humiliated in the assembly hall before the elders? Did you not mock her then? How was it manly and chivalrous when you and six other warriors surrounded young Abhimanyu and slew him?"

What had happened to the dharma you appeal for now? Wicked man, do not talk now of chivalry and fair play, for you have never honored them.”

When Krishna was denouncing him in this manner in order to urge Arjuna to prompt action, Karna bent his head in shame and uttered not a word. The wheel of Karna’s chariot did not budge, though he strove with all his strength. As you may recall, after Karna accidentally killed a cow and a calf, the owner of the cow, a Brahmin, had cursed Karna that at the fateful moment his chariot would get stuck.

Karna then tried to recall the mantras which he had learnt from Guru Parasurama to discharge celestial weapons and protect himself. His memory failed in the hour of his need, even as Parasurama had foretold. Karna had studied with Parasurama to get divine weapons. But Parasurama would not accept Kshyatriya students. So Karna lied, and said he was a Brahamana. However, one day when Parasurama was reclining with his head on Karna’s lap, a worm burrowed into Karna’s thigh. Karna bore the pain quietly because he did not want his teacher to wake up. Later, when Parasurama saw blood oozing out of the wound on Karna’s thigh, he became suspicious and said, “Karna, you are not a brahman but a Kshatriya, because Kshatriyas alone can bear bodily torment.” Karna confessed the guilt. Parasurama was angry, and gave him the curse, “At the hour of need you will fail to recall the mantra for the use of these mighty astras.” That curse inflicted by Parasurama worked at this crucial hour and Karna’s memory failed him.

“Waste no more time, Arjuna,” shouted Krishna. “Send your shaft and slay your wicked enemy.” Arjuna’s mind was wavering. His hand hesitated to do what was not chivalrous. But when Krishna said this again, Arjuna accepted the command of the Lord and sent an arrow which cut and severed the head of the Karna. Thus, on the battle field of Kurukshetra, a brother killed a brother.

### **Questions:**

Whose mother was Karna?

Whose mother was Arjuna?

Did Arjuna know who all his blood brothers were?

What were the names of the brothers?

Which warriors did Karna defeat in battle on the sixteenth day? Did he kill them? Why or why not?

What did Bhima do to Duhsasana? Why?

After Duhsasana’s death, Dronacharya’s son advised Duryodhana to make peace. He had lost his father, Duryodhana had lost a brother. What was Duryodhana’s reaction to the idea of making peace? Why were the two different in their approaches, when both had suffered a similar loss?

Who was the charioteer for Karna? Who for Arjuna? Which would you rather have? Why?

What were the two curses that hurt Karna during his duel with Arjuna? Why was he cursed? Was it Karna’s fault that he was cursed?

Why didn’t Arjuna let Karna get back in his chariot before slaying him? Who encouraged Arjuna?

Name at least one good quality of Karna. Name at least one bad quality. Was his downfall being friends with Duryodhana?

## **Sri Venkateswara Suprabhatam**

Kousalya supraja Rama poorva sandhya pravarthathe; Uttishta Narasardula karthavyamdhaivamanhikam(1)  
Uthishtothishta Govinda Uthishta Garuda dwaja; Uthishta Kamalakantha trilokyam mangalam kuru (2)  
Matahassamastha jagatham MaduKaitabareh; Vaksho viharini manohara divya murthe  
Sriswamini sritha jana priya dana seele; Sree Venkatesa dayite tava suprabhatham (3)  
Tava Suprabhatamaravindalochane; Bhavatu prasanna mukha chandramandale  
Vidhi Sankarendra vanithabhirarchite; Vrisha saila natha Dayite Dayanidhe! (4)  
Atryadi sapta rishayah samupasya sandhyam; Akasa sindhu kamalani manoharani  
Aadaya Padayugam archayitum prapannah; Seshadri sekhara vibho tava suprabhatham (5)  
Panchananabja Bhava Shanmukha Vasavadyah; Trivikramadi charitam Vibhudas stuvanti  
Bhashapathih Patathi vasara suddhimaarat; Seshadri sekhara vibho thava Suprabhatham (6)  
Eeshatrapulla saraseeruha narikela; Poogadrumadi sumanohara palikanam  
Aavati mandam Anilassaha divyagandhah; Seshadri Sekhara Vibho tava suprabhatham (7)  
Unmeelya netrayugam uttama Panjarasthah; Pathrava sishta kadaleephala payasani  
Bhuktvā saleelamatah Keli sukaḥ patanṭhi; Seshadri sekhara Vibho tava Suprabhatham (8)  
Tantree prakarsha madurasswanaya Vipanchya; Gayatyanantha charitham tava Naradopi  
Bhasha samagram asakrit kara chara ramyam; Seshadri Sekhara Vibho tava Suprabhatham (9)  
Bringavali cha makharanda rasaani viddah; Jangara geetha ninadhais saha sevanaya  
Niryatyupanta sarasee kamalodharebhyah; Seshadri sekhara Vibho tava Suprabhatam (10)  
Yosha ganena varadadni vimatyamane; Goshalayeshu dadi manthana teevra goshah  
Roshat kalim vidadate kakhubhascha kumbah; Seshadri sekhara Vibho tava suprabhatham (11)  
Padmesa mitra satha pathragathali vargah; harthum sriyam kuvalayasya nijanga Lakshmya  
Bherininadhamivabibhrati teevranadham; Seshadri sekhara vibho tava Suprabhatham (12)  
Srimannabhishta varadakhila lokhabando; Sri Srinivasa dayaika sindho  
Sri devata griha bhujantara divyamurte; Sri Venkatachalapathe tava suprabhatham (13)  
Sriswami pushkarinikaplava nirmalan kah; sreorthino Hara Virincha Sanandanadyah  
Dvare vasanthi vara vetrahatottamangah; Sri Venkatachalapathe tava suprabhatam (14)  
Sri Seshasaila Garudachala Venkatadri; Narayanadri Vrishabhadri Vrishadri mukhyam  
Aakhyam tvadiya vasateranisham vadanti; Sri Venkatachalapathe tava suprabhatam (15)  
**Sevaparāh Siva Suresa krisanudharma; Rakshombunatha Pavamana Dhanadhi nathah**  
**Baddanjali pravilasan nija sirsha desah; Sri Venkatachalapathe tava suprabhatam (16)**  
**Dhateeshu te Vihagaraja mrigadhiraja; Nagadhiraja gajaraja haydhirajah**  
**Swasvadhikaramahimadhikam arthayante; Sri Venkatachalapate tava suprabhatam (17)**

**Suryendu Bhauma Budha Vakpati Kavyasowri**  
**Swarbhanu Ketu divishat parishat pradhanah**  
**Tvaddasa dasa charamow atidasa dsah**  
**Sri Venkatachala pate tava suprabhatam (18)**

*O Lord! The over lords of the nine planets, (Surya, Chandra, Angaraka, Budha, Guru, Shukra, Sani, Rahu, Kethu) are ready waiting to offer you their service.*

**Tvat pada dooli parita spuritottamangah**  
**Svargapavarga nirapeksha nijantarangah**  
**Kalpagamakalaniah aakulatam labhante**  
**Sri Venkatachalapate tava suprabhatam (19)**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucSm8aB\\_Mz0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucSm8aB_Mz0)

**Jumble Words – All words are from this lesson**

L I G T U

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Coloring Exercise: Lord Shiva